

CONSERVATION

Vote set on creation of town land bank

By KENDRA JOHNSON
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DUXBURY — Creating a land bank through which to finance land purchases will be an option for voters at the next town meeting.

At their meeting last night, selectmen said they will reserve an article on the next town meeting warrant to present voters with the conservation commission's proposal for a land bank, a fund for land acquisition to preserve open space.

"We think it's our responsibility to work with you folks to put this through the town meeting process," said Mark Mahoney, chairman of the commission.

Commissioners presented selectmen with several examples of land banks, including

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those in Nantucket, Martha's Vineyard, Marion and Cape Cod.

Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard use their land banks to purchase land for open space and recreation. Cape Cod uses the money to set aside land for walking and bicycling and to preserve sources of drinking water.

Commissioners also outlined the Community Preservation Act, which would enable towns to adopt a specific funding plan for acquiring open space. The measure has passed the state Senate and is pending in the House.

Land banks are funded by a 2 percent real estate transfer tax or a .2 or 3 percent surcharge on property taxes.

Marion also uses gifts and appropriations to

build its fund. Duxbury conservation administrator Joseph Grady said most land banks have a "sunset clause," which applies the additional taxes for only a certain amount of time.

Commissioners said a 3 percent surcharge on property taxes in Duxbury would raise about \$800,000 annually. They are researching land banks in other towns before drafting the town meeting article.

"What we're looking for is a more consistent long-term funding mechanism to carry out a land-acquisition program," Grady said.

Selectmen agreed that town meeting should be able to vote on a land-bank proposal, but had concerns about establishing such a fund.

"You're going to be asking people to take on a double tax, so to speak," Selectman Margaret Kearney said.

Kearney suggested using some of the land-bank funds to reduce the debt on Camp Wing, 354 acres of conservation land town meeting bought last year. Residents approved a Proposition 2½ override for the purchase, which cost \$1.5 million.

Selectmen Chairman John Tuffy worried that money may be reserved for land purchases instead of more pressing needs, such as education.

In another matter, selectmen, who double as the water commissioners, voted to lift the water ban.

Water and Sewer Superintendent Carl Hillstrom requested that water restrictions be removed. He said that, because of the recent rain, water levels in town wells are returning to normal.

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